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ABSTRACT

According to the author, people who favor compulsory assignment of children to schools on the basis of race base their position on the assumptions that Americans will make no progress toward an integrated society except under compulsion, and that the proof of an integrated society is the even distribution of minorities throughout society. In this paper, the author offers arguments and statistics to refute these two assumptions. He presents demographic evidence of a recent trend toward greater racial equality and asserts that this trend makes radical solutions like compulsory busing unnecessary. And the fact that members of many racial and ethnic groups tend to cluster together voluntarily, he argues, shows the folly of striving for the equal distribution of minority groups throughout our society. (JG)

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On Alternatives to Busing.

-- Nathan Glazer

Let me try to characterize our dilemma as we confront the next stage in the long story of school desegregation. The great majority of the American people -- all indeed but a tiny minority -- avow that they believe in integrated schools, oppose the separation of the races in education which was one of the great shames of this nation for many decades. An almost equally great majority support the principle of integrated neighborhoods, agree that blacks -- and any other group -- should have the right to live any place they can afford. Here our nation is completely together. Blacks, whites, and other groups, the better educated and the poorer educated, the middle class and white-collar workers all agree on these propositions. But they are severely divided -- indeed polarized -- by what is now presented to them by the Federal courts, the dominant mass media, and by leading social scientists, as the means by which to achieve the desegregation of the schools and an integrated society generally. One tries in this kind of discussion to avoid loaded and coded words, and I will in my own presentation try to characterize these means -- admittedly "busing" is the term that is best understood and most widely in use -- by as neutral a formulation as I can conceive of: the means whereby the courts and the great body of liberal and progressive opinion hope to achieve school desegregation and integration is through the even distribution of

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schoolchildren by race and ethnic group through all the schools of as large an area as can be conveniently reached by conventional means of transportation, by the direct assignment of children to schools on the basis of race and ethnicity. It is not the objective of school integration that polarizes us -- at least if we take what people say seriously. It is the means.

Those who accept these means, who advocate these means, however, do not trust the commitment of the great majority of the American people to integration. These are words, not deeds, they point out. These fair words conceal both an antipathy to contact with blacks and other minority groups and a desire to maintain them in inferior as well as segregated schools. The only guarantee of equal education they assert is even distribution by race through all the schools. And this, too, is the only guarantee of an integrated society.

Thus the means -- even distribution by race -- has become the key issue. It represents to those who support it the commitment of this nation to an integrated society. Its limitation or abandonment represent to them the abandoning of our commitment to an integrated society, the reversing of Brown and of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

If the limitation of the means did represent the repeal of Brown, of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, of the abandonment of the hope for an integrated society, then I, too, would be an advocate of these means. The argument I would like to present to those who believe these means are the only hope for an integrated society is that they look at social trends in

this country, that they consider whether this is indeed an increasingly divided nation, and fated to become two nations unless these drastic means are adopted; and further that they consider what in truth is our joint objective when we are fully committed, as we all are, to an integrated society. In summary, I would argue, first, that we are becoming an integrated society -- but not through the means of school assignment and transportation by race -- and second that the objective of an integrated society, in our multi-racial and multi-ethnic America, is not one in which every major group is evenly distributed statistically in every institution or governmentally supported program or neighborhood or sphere of life.

Let me first review the trends with you.

The key trends that tell me that the Kerner Commission was wrong, that we are not becoming two nations, is that black and white -- and, I would add, the "Spanish-surnamed" groups -- are steadily coming closer to each other in income, in occupational distribution, in education, and in residence.

In income, the 1960's saw a steady rise in the ratio of income of blacks to white. This reached a peak in 1969-70, and since then has fallen back somewhat -- though even in falling back in the difficult years since 1971 it still remains considerably above the level of the beginning of the 1960's. But more significant than this overall trend in the relationship of black to white income is the remarkable rise, to a position near equality with that of whites, of young unbroken black families. This rise in the position of the young unbroken black family -- the family with a head under 35 years of age -- has taken place in the South as well as in the North. In the South, the median income of these families was 87 per cent of the

median income of white families in 1973. In the North and West it was 93 per cent of the median of white families. For young black families we are in a situation close to income equality. Further, the failure of black income in general to rise to a position of near equality with whites is owing, first, to the tragic heritage of segregation and discrimination, which holds back older black families; and second, to the equally tragic and poorly understood increase in recent years of female-headed black families -- and female-headed families, black or white, are not going to do well in the labor market.

This rise in income has been matched by a startling change in the occupations of blacks. I will not overwhelm you with statistics, but it is clear there has been a striking rise in the past ten years in the number of blacks who hold better jobs. One contrast: in 1964, 16 per cent of black males were white-collar workers; in 1974, 24 per cent. Meanwhile the proportion of white males who were white-collar workers remained stable.

Nor will it be a surprise to you that these past ten years have seen startling changes in educational attainment for blacks: the Census has just reported that blacks now enter colleges in the same proportion as whites.

The point of this recording of change is that residential distribution is inevitably based, in large measure, in this country, on income, occupation, and education, and if blacks approach whites in these respects, then inevitably black residential distribution will become less concentrated, and school systems based on proximity will become more integrated. I do not intend to deny that a good part of black residential concentration is caused

by discrimination; but a great deal of it is caused by low income, by poor occupations, by poor education.

The increase in residential integration is not a matter of hypothesis. Calculations by Karl Taeuber, the demographer, showed an increase in black segregation in the 1950's while black populations in Northern cities grew, and black distribution in Southern cities began to take on the Northern ghetto pattern. But his data show that this process was reversed in the 1960's. There is to my mind even more significant evidence of the reversal of the pattern of segregation in American cities.

The University of Michigan Institute for Social Research has been asking national samples -- in 1964, 1968, 1970, ~~1972~~ -- what is the racial composition of their neighborhood. The number of whites answering "all white" dropped from 80 to 73 per cent between 1964 and 1972. The number of blacks answering "all black" dropped from 33 to 22 per cent. They also asked respondents about the racial composition of the school nearest them. Whites saying of grade schools "all white" dropped from 59 to 36 per cent, blacks saying "all black" from 40 to 13 per cent. The answers for high schools fell from 43 to 22 per cent for whites (answering "all white") and from 36 to 8 per cent for blacks (saying "all black"). These trends continued in the 1974 survey.

I do not wish to suggest that the milennium has arrived; that we have an integrated society today, or that one is around the corner. Yet there have been remarkable changes -- changes that we owe to, of course, the black struggle for equality, the strong Civil Rights laws, but changes that by now are institutionalized, that continue without the need for stern enforcement

or police presence. It is also worth noting how little attention has been given to this progress. Thus, every piece of evidence of black economic and occupational and educational progress has been depreciated, greeted skeptically -- interestingly enough, by those who present themselves as the strongest supporters of black progress. The image with which we are presented daily is that this remains two nations, sharply divided -- it is this false image that justifies such drastic measures as the involuntary transportation of students on the basis of race. For if indeed we are two nations, as some continue to insist, then only the most drastic measures will be effective in bringing these two nations together. Whereas if we look at the signs of progress, many people will quite properly ask, why are these drastic measures necessary?

Admittedly the actual measure of school desegregation achieved through economic and educational progress and resulting residential integration is relatively small. We are only at the beginning of this process. It is more a promise for the future than a reality of today. Yet there is in many cities a substantial degree of integration affecting sizable minorities of black students and in some cases -- depending on how we define integration -- majorities. Just as we have had all too little attention to the facts of black economic and educational progress, we have had all too little attention to the quantum of integration that has been occurring without special efforts to promote it. And there <u>are</u> methods available to increase this proportion of black students who have the opportunity to go to school with whites, without involuntary school assignment on the basis of race. The chief method available, to my mind, is that much maligned technique,

"Freedom of Choice." "Freedom of Choice" was given a bad name because it was used in the South, in the days of resistance to desegregation, as a means of dividing it, and often combined with threats and violence against blacks. But where "Freedom of Choice" has been available in good faith, it has been accepted eagerly by substantial numbers of black parents. John McAdams has studied all the available evidence and finds that up to 30 per cent of eligible students will take advantage of freedom of choice. It has to be combined today with the right to interdistrict transfer -- the right to attend a school outside one's district, if the exercise of that right promotes integration, because in many cities residential change radically restricts this opportunity if it is to be exercised only within the city. Congressman Richardson Preyer's bill, with its requirement of majority to minority transfer, within and between districts, would make possible -- if exercised in good faith -- a substantial measure of integration without compulsion.

In short, the abandonment of compulsory school assignment on the basis of race would not, as we are so commonly told by those who advocate it and insist it is the only means to an integrated society, in any way mean the abandonment of the progress toward an integrated society and the commitment to create an integrated society. For we are already in large measure an integrated society, the degree of integration is increasing, and it can be further increased by voluntary means. All this is obscured by the painful struggle over compulsory means of school integration, assignment on the basis of race. It is our task to make the facts I have outlined better known. If better known, I believe in time the Federal

judiciary itself would realize it has been misled into requiring involuntary school assignment by race as the only means to achieve integration.

But there is a second task and a second misunderstanding that must be cleared away. It will be pointed out that many black children will be left in black majority or indeed all black schools under encouragement of voluntary transfer. Quite true. But now we must ask, what is our objective in hoping and working for an integrated society? Is it one in which every major group of our multi-racial and multi-ethnic society is distributed evenly through every major institution and every major sphere of life? Nathan Kantrowitz has pointed out in his research how unrealistic such an objective is. Even groups in this country against whom little prejudice and discrimination has been directed and who have lived in cities for generations, show a tendency to cluster residentially. If a group is real, it will have distinctive and real characteristics, and some of these will encourage clustering and concentration simply because some value is shared by the group. Only for blacks and for some other groups that have been misguidedly brought under the authority of court integration orders -- e.g., the varied Spanish-surnamed groups and the Chinese in San Francisco -- do we insist that integration must mean the totally unrealistic objective of equal statistical proportions in every school. This has not been the test for integration we have applied to the Irish, the Jews, the Italians and other ethnic groups. These groups and others have continued to show concentrations in occupations, in residence, in schools, that is no longer in any way the result of discrimination -- it is the end-product of a complex group history. Why should we expect differently for the blacks or Spanish-surnamed? As long as we maintain a strict ban on discrimination and on

segregatory acts, it should be no concern of the state or the courts how people choose to distribute themselves.

Admittedly, much black clustering today is not voluntary. Much is the result of poverty, and that must be attacked by public measures that provide greater opportunity and greater income for deprived blacks (as for the deprived of other groups). Much is the heritage of state efforts at segregation, and that part must be undone. Much is the result of current discrimination, illegal under the Civil Rights Act and court orders, and that must not be allowed. But much is the expression of black community -- of the same desires and actions that motivate many groups in our multi-ethnic society. Integration does not mean that every community that brings together people of a given culture must be destroyed regardless of its origin. The thinking of many of us has been misguided. We have placed before ourselves an unreal and unrealistic objective -- even distribution of every race and minority -- and then we chastise ourselves for not attaining this objective. Our thinking has been that of Judge Roth in Detroit, who criticized blacks as well as whites for creating black concentrations: "blacks, like ethnic groups in the past," he wrote disapprovingly in his decree declaring the Detroit schools were segregated, "have tended to separate themselves and associate together." Indeed! And what is wrong with that, as long as it is not compelled by discrimination and prejudice?

We have unfortunately still a long way to go and much misguided social policy will be foisted on us on the basis of these two illusions: that we are making and can make no progress toward an integrated society except under compulsion, and that the test of an integrated society is the even

distribution of minorities throughout society. These twin illusions testify to an innocence of knowledge of group life; they also testify, I fear, to a taste for compulsion in this area of many people. As social scientists, our task is to spread, as rapidly as possible, a more accurate picture of what is taking place in our society, what can take place in our society, and what kind of humane and decent objectives are possible for us to realize in our society. Hopefully in time we will convince the mass media, black leaders and communities, Federal judges, that to abandon involuntary school assignment by race is not to abandon progress toward an integrated society.